FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

Volume 2, Number 1 September 1973

THE STRUCTURE OF A MISSIONARY CHURCH

Wilbert R. Shenk

Among the Christian traditions there are varying views as to what is the essence of the church. We speak of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Free Church and other concepts of the church. Consequently, one of the most frequently used words in the Christian vocabulary is subject to ambiguity. The conviction underlying this paper is that how we view the church is of fundamental importance.

The concept of the church has been polarized around two foci: institution and event. The majority of Christians have viewed the church as an institution with her life ordered and regulated through a hierarchy. A minority has insisted that the church is event and the church happens when there is a fresh outpouring of divine grace through the Spirit. Both emphases have their roots in the Old Testament.

The Believers' Church understanding calls for both event and institution. The new word from God comes through event, pointing to the new path of faithfulness to God's call to mission. The means by which that faithfulness is expressed requires the institution; but it is an institution modified by the demands of mission in the contemporary age rather than mission shaped by institution. Event thrusts God's people out in mission even while renewing them in their inner motivation. Institution provides the framework for that missionary obedience to be realized.

Abraham and Moses: Event Shapes Institution

Abraham called out to live his life in a pilgrimage of faith without benefit of the institutional securities of clan and community symbolizes the event character of the people of God. Ready response to the call of God is possible only if God's people are ever poised to hear afresh the summons to new paths of obedience as were Abraham and his descendants.

The Mosaic motif points toward "institution." Formation of the community of faith was based on God's word which described and defined the ways God's people were to live together. The worship of God was to be the central act of their community life. Through worship they proclaimed the kingship of God and ordered their lives according to His rule.

There is, therefore, within the Bible a tension between the Abrahamic and Mosaic motifs. God's people are to be a pilgrim people whose certain destiny is fixed by transcendent values and commitments. That pilgrimage is to be carried out in a dying world. God communicates with them through events by which their sights are realigned and the fresh path of faithfulness demarcated in the great movement toward ". . . the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10b).

Yet this pilgrim people is to have a rich community life. For this a clear basis has been provided in the institutional framework--including regulation of worship, communal relations and responsibility to the "world." We have in tension two perspectives: "event" and "institution." The biblical record shows that they belong together. Event symbolizes the response of faith; institution reveals order placed at the disposal of faith. Event testifies to God's desire to communicate with and lead His people; institution is God providing for the welfare of the faithful.

The interaction or intersection of event and institution is the essential concern of missions.

Our view of the church and her mission is of great consequence. At least some of the present uncertainty about the purposes or mission of the church can be traced to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. At the same time some groups have a sharply defined self-understanding and fervently propagate their sub-biblical message. We, therefore, turn to biblical materials if we want to clarify the nature and mission of the church.

Biblical Images Suggest Dynamic Tension

In his indispensable study, Images of the Church in the New Testament, Paul S. Minear has identified nearly 100 images and metaphors describing the church. These can be grouped into several major divisions:

A. The People of God. In I Peter 2:9-10 we find the classic statement of this theme: ". . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people . . . Once you were no people but now you are God's people . . ." The purpose of this image is two-fold: 1) to differentiate the people of God from all other peoples and 2) to show how the present-day people of God are connected with His people of previous generations.

   Contemporary use of the term "people" tends to obscure the basic meaning. What is intended here is not "people-in-general" or mankind as a whole. The force of this biblical concept is to particularize and distinguish. Being a person, a part of the human family, without belonging to a particular community with identifiable characteristics is inconceivable. This image underscores the uniqueness of this God peoplehood. Specifically, they are a people because God took the initiative in constituting them, they are a fruit of His grace rather than the product of any human designs.

B. The Body of Christ. This term is unique to the writings and thought of the Apostle Paul. It emphasizes the corporateness (or corporeality) of the church. It conveys interdependence and indissolubility rather than mere collectivity. Instead of conjuring up the image of a series of individuals joining a club, it speaks of incorporation and integration.

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This body is filled out or completed by the presence and participation of each member (I Cor. 12, 14; Eph. 4). Each member is valued both because he has been dignified by being incorporated and because he has a vital role to play in the functioning of the whole.

Most important of all, the body of Christ is His dwelling place through the Holy Spirit. Christ's presence in the world is made visible and operational through His body.

C. The New Creation. This image points to God's redemptive activity in creating a new humanity. The order of creation is superseded by the order of redemption. What was lost through the incursion of sin into the world is now restored through the new creation (II Cor. 5:17).

This "new creation" functions in the world as the "first fruits"--an eschatological sign of God's ultimate intention. The new humanity stands in contrast to the old humanity, calling attention to God's cosmic purposes to "make all things new." It is a "new creation" in process of formation.

D. A Community of Disciples Engaged in Discipling. One of the striking features of Jesus' ministry was that He called for followers from the outset. These followers were distinguished from the casual crowds by the seriousness of their commitment and their readiness to "disciple" other people. Their relationship with Jesus was that of pupils and teacher. They gave themselves to Him in order that they might be disciplined by His teachings, purposes and spirit. In the process they found themselves being bonded together by a new covenant and set forth on a new mission.

This image of the church suggests a community of committed people gathered around the person and teachings of Jesus Christ whose singular aim is to become like the Master, embodying in their life together what it means to be the new humanity to the glory of God. They are not yet perfect but on the way toward experiencing that perfection which is found in Christ.

The Functions of the Church Call for Order and Spontaneity

Another way of thinking about the church and her mission is to examine her functions. The rather standard description of these functions has come to be the triad: kerygma, koinonia and diakonia.

Here we identify four indispensable functions which must characterize the life of the church:

A. Sharing (koinonia). The New Testament term for fellowship, koinonia, is rich in meaning. The basis of this fellowship is Jesus Christ ("participation in His body") and His claims on men. It is no private exercise carried out by the individual. It is focused in the work of Christ, the awareness of His presence among His people now and the transformation in relationships that results (Eph. 2). There is mutuality and caring nourished by periodically meeting together for worship, confession, hearing the word, receiving admonition, commemorating the Lord's Supper as well as coming to decision together about life's great issues.

B. Binding and Loosing (discipline). One of the phrases frequently used by

Jesus was "the kingdom of God." The object of Christ's coming was to establish the "reign of God" among men. The great goal of the church is to fully experience the "reign of God." It is the purpose of discipline among God's people to lead every member to live under the rule of God.

In order to achieve this, each member is responsible to assist other brothers and sisters along the way. The Matthew 18:15-20 passage lodges this responsibility very clearly and provides a pattern for dealing with problems which will arise. The degree to which a church is concerned about discipline is a major indication as to how vital and serious that church is about its life together.

C. Discipling (apostolate). Very early in Jesus' ministry (Luke 9), He commissioned His disciples to go out and announce the "good news." Shortly thereafter he sent out an additional 70 people (Luke 10). Before His ascension Jesus specifically charged His disciples to take the "good news" to the entire world.

The Pentecost experience further dramatized the design for the church as consisting of people won from every conceivable background. The new Testament church was driven by the Spirit into many new communities in order that the good news about Jesus might be shared and God's kingdom or rule extended. The church's first responsibility to the peoples of the world is to announce the gospel.

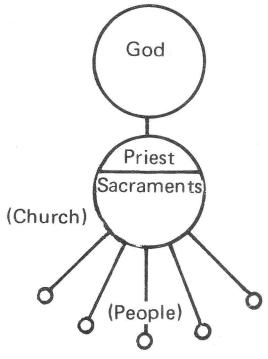
D. Serving (diakonia). This function of the church is directly derived from the example of Jesus Himself. The Messiah depicted in Isaiah is the Suffering Servant--a reversal of the usual description of a messianic leader. Jesus reinforced this understanding by such statements as, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The mentality and spirit of Jesus are classically summarized in Phil. 2:5-8.

This means for the church that her self-understanding is to be patterned after that of her Lord's and that she is to give practical expression to her nature which is to care for the poor, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, minister to the enemy.

Models Portray Essence

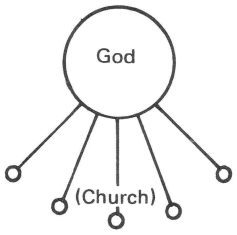
Still another way of thinking about church and mission has to do with its shape of form. What forms of church have emerged in history? We depict three types here:

A. Roman Catholic. The essence of the church within the Roman tradition is that the church is where the bishop (or priest) is present and the sacraments are observed.

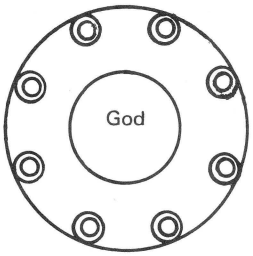


This is sometimes termed the "horizontalist" position where there is emphasis on continuity within history and the true church is found in the context of a visibly continuous ministry (through "apostolic succession"), creeds, liturgy and the sacraments.

B. Protestant. This understanding emphasizes that the church is where the word is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments properly observed. Known as the "objective vertical" view, there is a premium on the individual's personal response which is called forth through the preaching of the word sustained by the sacraments.



C. Believers' Church. According to this view, the church is a fellowship of those inwardly transformed by the power of the Spirit and who are now following Christ in the company of the brotherhood. This view has been termed the "subjective vertical" in that it calls for the free response of the believer to the Spirit.



Form Follows Mission

Each of these models focuses on the essence of the church as viewed from "within." What is missing is the way in which the church relates to the world. This is crucial for the mission of the church and the rationale and strategy of evangelism will differ according to the viewpoint. In the Roman Catholic concept, jurisdiction of the church extends everywhere. People need to be "Christianized" through a process starting with baptizing babies, nurturing them into the faith and observance of the sacraments.

The Protestant model, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the individual. The evangelistic message addresses the need for a personal decision. Particularly in the Lutheran view it is also understood that the Christian is a citizen of two kingdoms. His life is lived in both realms. At some points he will act according to the requirements of the one, at other times according to the dictates of the other.

In both Roman Catholic and Protestant models it is assumed that not every member is equally responsible for the life and mission of the church. Special orders or voluntary societies achieve a greater degree of spirituality, and they are assigned particular tasks. The rank and file are not expected to live up to these higher standards.

In contrast, the Believers' Church sees the people of God as a disciplined and committed minority whose total existence is missionary. Membership is granted on the basis of deliberate personal choice. Members accept responsibilities laid on them by virtue of the gifts sovereignly granted by the Holy Spirit for the service of the whole people. Lines between church and world are clear. The state does not assist the church in its tasks. Membership supersedes all other loyalties, and the individual's solidarity is with this people.

Evangelism in the Believers' Church vision calls persons to join the people of God in their pilgrimage through history. It pleads with them to become disciples of Jesus Christ and be joined to His people. The whole population is not assumed to be "Christian." Rather persons must consciously decide to join this God movement. The missionary is not an isolated individual or a member of a special order but a member of the church. The church itself is a part of the "good news" to the extent that it is a living experiment in following Jesus.

In short, the church is a visible, living demonstration of what happens when people consciously choose to live under "the rule of God."

Examples abound of how the church has been strapped for centuries through sterile institutionalism. Furthermore, there is the tendency even within those groups which insist that they are "event"-oriented to allow their experience to be canalized into rigid forms. Western Pentecostals, for example, have not found it easy to relate to Christians in the African Independent Churches who also emphasize the spontaneous character of the Christian faith.

God wants to lead His people by the fresh interventions of His Spirit, creating anew the institutional forms required to be faithful in mission. Abraham and Moses continue to set the course for God's people in the world--a people called to live in tents but with life ordered by the "reign of God."

Editorial Comment

When Mission-Focus was begun a year ago, it was intended that this periodical be a forum for serious discussion of vital current themes. As such it is circulated to approximately 1500 leadership persons at home and abroad. All of the issues making up Volume 1 have been reprinted to meet additional requests for quantity orders. A small inventory of these is still on hand.

Mission-Focus is designed to speak to mission issues world-wide. Particular writers necessarily reflect their background of experience. However, the hope is that Mission-Focus has added relevance precisely because in this shrinking world the experience of the church in one part of the globe can shed light on the questions being faced elsewhere. We want to facilitate this pooling and propagating of experience world-wide.

The succeeding issues of Volume 2 will explore some implications of the life and mission of the Believers' Church. Authors and titles are listed in order of appearance: Paul M. Miller, "A Shape for the Congregation of the Future," and "Choosing Leaders in the Congregation," Glenn Brubacher, "Mennonites and Evangelism," and James D. Kratz, "Training for Ministry and Mission."

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A SHAPE FOR THE CONGREGATION OF THE FUTURE

Paul M. Miller

Introduction

My intention here is to reflect upon the present situation, to suggest the realities of church life which should occur in each setting, and to propose a broad outline of the shape congregational life might take. Only the North American Mennonite Church is being cited; but a new openness in polity is emerging, as is evident for example in Study Encounter prepared by the Faith and Order Commission for use world-wide in 1974. It asserts that the New Testament itself allows "multiple forms of church order" (Study Encounter, VIII, 1972, p. 8).

In the next issue of Mission-Focus we will take up related questions of leadership selection, methods of decision-making, etc.

A Survey of the Present Situation

Some new wine is stretching the old skins. What shape will the new churchly reality take?

An ever-deepening study of our New Testament and Anabaptist roots is forcing us to ask whether we have adequate structures for decision-making, appropriate settings for discerning one another's gifts, or the best ways to hear a new believer's request for believer's baptism. Our theology calls emphatically for Biblical preaching but some advocates of house fellowships see little place for it in the small group setting. Our faith calls for brotherly admonition and discipline, but the form of much of our congregational life does not encourage it. We need mutual aid, prophetic action, mission and evangelism which fits our faith, but the forms and structures we have borrowed need some stretching.

The size of our "average" congregation seems stuck at the worst possible plateau, 80 to 100 members. This is much too large to experience the closeness, mutual discipline, sharing, and group decision-making which a good house fellowship can know. It is also much too small to enjoy the economies of scale,

the employment of specialized ministers, the peer-group of youth, and many of the other benefits which go with a "great congregation." In many of these smaller congregations members wear out their time and energies trying to maintain the machinery needed for the educational, fellowship and missionary ministries of a 400-member congregation.

Some of our most evangelistic and fastest growing congregations have faced a serious crisis as they have tried to plan ahead for adequate facilities. It was almost as if they were being made to feel guilty because they were growing. Some persons who saw primarily the need for and advantages of the small house fellowship have hinted darkly that it is a decadent and self-centered church which spends money for church buildings. Others argued that since the early church did not build specialized edifices for their meeting houses, therefore the church throughout history should not do so either!

In some recent discussions the very existence of the "meetinghouse" option was ignored and the assumption made that believers must choose between either of only two options: the "house fellowship" or the "sanctuary church." This paper does not consider a "sanctuary church" as an option at all, and proposes a church made up of a number of "house fellowships" united in a "great congregation" instead.

A new seriousness is evident among some of those who seek to plan ahead for needed space for the shared activities of the larger household of faith or "great congregation." New ways are being sought and found to make full use of available facilities. The time honored concept of the "meetinghouse" is being reclaimed and used. There is a new determination to embody careful stewardship in all planning, and to symbolize the faith of a believers' church in any "meetinghouses" which are erected.

Some congregational committees are doing time-use-cost studies to ascertain just how much per week per member a "meetinghouse" will cost if amortized over the years it may reasonably be expected to serve the congregation. A number of studies have disclosed that the amount members have spent for their "meetinghouse" has compared closely to what members have spent for their daily newspaper. It in no way compared to what members spend for their year's vacation trip or other expenses in comparable categories.

Churchly Realities and the Best Setting for Each

A. A Part of Churchly Reality Happens Best in the "House Fellowship," such as:
   1. hearing the testimony of the "confessing man" (Matt. 16:18) and affirming his readiness for baptism.
   2. binding and loosing as members help one another to follow Jesus in life (Matt. 18:17).
   3. "greeting the brethren" and confronting in brotherly admonition and discipline (I Tim. 6:10).
   4. forgiving one another after failures (basin and towel, John 13:14), declaring absolution, in a vital brotherhood of service and forgiveness.
   5. specific day-by-day caring, sharing food, bearing one another's burdens, engaging in fellowship evangelism.
   6. discerning and affirming gifts by which the Holy Spirit creates body (I Cor. 12:18,23).
   7. praying for one another during "sendings" or prayers for healing (Jas. 5:14).

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8. giving and receiving counsel concerning ethical issues encountered in the world.
9. assisting one another in problems related to personal faith and faithfulness, vocational choice, marriage, change of jobs, retirement, etc.
10. enriching family living through times of recreation, nature study, picnics and wholesome fun on an inter-generational basis. The house fellowship may be wise to hold two kinds of services--one for fellowship, and one for serious discussion and decision.
11. banding together to move out in evangelism, establishing a new house fellowship in another area; expanding by planned division.
12. sharing ecstatic experiences, creating and singing of spiritual songs.

B. A Part of Churchly Reality Is Best Mediated Through the "Great Congregation" Gathered in the Meetinghouse, such as:
1. the larger congregation can provide balance, the "multitude of counselors" and their wisdom. Small groups tend to suffer from one-sidedness (III John 9). Seldom can an intense small group avoid bias, narrowness, or what group dynamics researchers call "group think."
2. the gifts God's Spirit places first seem given to the "great congregation" or "meetinghouse" group. These include the equipping gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11). It appears that God's Spirit placed these first (I Cor. 12:28) and does so repeatedly (I Tim. 1:18).
3. the "great congregation" helps decide when small groups disagree (Acts 15).
4. the "great congregation" can ignite the inspiration for festivals, celebrations, thanksgivings, baptisms, covenant renewal, eucharists, protests, missionary thrusts and mass evangelism.
5. the "great congregation" can provide exposition, teaching of the meaning of the Scriptures and God's mighty acts so that the pilgrim people can find their places in history.
6. the "great congregation" can train for and administer programs of relief, social action, mission, prophetic witness to principalities, and cooperate with the agencies of world-wide relief, mission and action.
7. the "great congregation" can engage in interchurch conversation and fellowship.

Suggestions as to the Shape Congregational Life Might Take

A. Congregations using large meetinghouses should seek an optimum size of 250 to 400 members. Small fellowships should consider banding together to form a great congregation.
B. All members should hold a single membership expressed in two levels of churchly reality: in the meetinghouse or great congregation, and in a house fellowship which is in a satellite and supporting relationship.
C. The name "church" should be reserved for membership and participation in the total churchly reality, both house fellowship and meetinghouse congregation.
D. Church-wide agencies should correspond with and relate primarily to the large meetinghouse or great congregation. Paul wrote letters to the entire area-church, the great congregation, at Ephesus, or Philippi, or Rome, or Thessalonica, rather than to every individual house fellowship. Obviously he sought to avoid the very real possibility of every small house fellowship going its independent way. That same concern should be deeply felt today.
E. Each great congregation should be led by a team with a central or chief "Servant-of-the Word," assisted by helpers or elders, one selected by each

house fellowship. The chief "Servant-of-the-Word should be ordained, whereas elders might be suitably commissioned. Ordination serves to symbolize the centrality of the Scriptures and their teaching.

F. The decisions about major policies, sanctions, positions, prophetic pronouncements, etc., should be agreed upon by the great congregation gathered in the meetinghouse. The house fellowships may initiate discussion and submit proposals or serve as a task-force for study.

G. Serious cases of discipline should be referred by the house fellowship, by and through their elder, to the leadership team and the great congregation for action.

H. Love-feasts should be held in the small house fellowship, as often and as spontaneously as the Spirit moves, while the more liturgical Lord's Supper should be observed in the great congregation gathered in the meetinghouse. Washing of the saints' feet may well be observed along with the house fellowship love feasts.

I. Instruction of new believers, (judging a person to be faithful to the Lord), and recommending him or her for baptism should be done by the house fellowship. The actual baptizing should be in charge of the elders and the house fellowship but performed in the midst of the great congregation.

J. Scrutinizing of one another's budgets and endorsing one another's giving intentions should be done in the house fellowship, but adoption of the congregational budget should be done in the great congregation after all the elders have brought in their report of the giving intentions of house fellowship members.

K. Church letters should be forwarded by the central office of the congregation, with the approval of all of the elders; but the actual letter, which includes a description of the member's gifts for ministry, should be countersigned by at least two-thirds of the members of his/her house fellowship.

L. The worship services of the house fellowship should emphasize sharing, praise, testimonies, decision-making, spontaneous mutual aid, love feasts, spiritual songs, laying on of hands, prayers for healing, giving and receiving of admonition, Bible study, intercessory prayer sessions, evangelistic conversation, mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, and hearing and discussing reports from the great congregation or church agencies. The worship services of the great congregation should emphasize expository preaching, choral readings, the use of majestic hymns and massed choirs, recital of creeds or confessions of faith, formulation of words of prophetic appeal to men in power, festivals appropriate to the Christian calendar, receiving of missionary challenge, evangelistic appeal and hearing reports from house fellowships.

M. Ideally every member should attend at least two services of worship every week: one objective, ordered worship service in the great congregation; and one service of a more intimate and subjective character held in the house fellowship. The fellowship group may meet either during the Sunday school hour or on Sunday evening, or on a weekday evening in the home of one of the members. The Sunday morning hour should be reserved for the worship of the great congregation in the meetinghouse and for Christian education experiences for children. Each congregation should decide its schedule and the constituent house fellowships each decide their own schedule.

N. Because of the very heavy agenda of churchly realities which should occur in the small group or house fellowship, its services should be at least one and one-half hours in length. The great congregation's worship might be attempted in an hour, but more time will be required if and as all of the house fellowships send in their reports and suggestions as they ought to do.

O. The initiative for linking house fellowships and the great congregation should rest with equal urgency upon both. Every house fellowship should be reminded that it is in danger of becoming schismatic if it does not seek linkage with a great congregation. Likewise every great congregation should feel the imperative to reach out to welcome emerging fellowships, recent converts, immigrant groups of believers which are in the area, and to promise to take seriously any messages the house fellowship sends in. House fellowships should not merely seek ties with other small groups like themselves. House fellowships should organize their own inner life according to the gifts discerned in their midst.

P. Officers of the district conference should be given a mandate to help house fellowships and great congregations to work out a happy two-way flow of mutual support, admonition, interaction, discernment, and a program of united action.

Q. Buildings, supplies, equipment, etc., could be under the administrative oversight of a resources committee of the large meetinghouse congregation, with constant concern that facilities are fully used and freely shared so that all possible funds can go to serve the poor and further world evangelism.

R. Membership records, including the location of each member in a house fellowship, should be maintained by the central office of the great congregation. Persons who are invalids, shut-ins, or unable to attend meetinghouse or house fellowship services should be the special concern of the leadership team and of the house fellowship and provision be made for their nurture and fellowship.

S. Persons who desire only the great congregation experiences held in the meetinghouse, and who for any reason do not wish to be a part of a house fellowship, should be the special concern of the leadership team. It may be that a less demanding and less revealing type of traditional prayer meeting can be arranged for them until they gain courage and readiness to venture into a house fellowship. After all, many of the successes being reported by house fellowships are those which serve primarily young people and their peers. Forming house fellowships which include the life span will likely be more difficult. Both the great congregation and the house fellowship shall be concerned about the Christian education of youth and children and each provide the portion of it best suited to that setting.

T. Funerals should be in charge of the leadership team of the congregation with special testimonies from the deceased person's house fellowship members. The sustained concern and listening love which grieving survivors always need should become the concern of the house fellowship.

U. Weddings should be in charge of the leadership team of the great congregation with special involvement of house fellowship members as this may be most appropriate. The great congregation may well appoint task forces to work at the strengthening of marriage relationships. House fellowships should seek to give counsel as they are able so that marriage may be truly a churchly experience.

V. The leadership team should offer leadership in long-range planning, in organizational development, in leadership development, in suggesting the person for the ordained Servant-of-the-Word, and in coming to the aid of a house fellowship which experiences serious crisis.

W. The Board of Congregational Ministries of the denomination may well give counsel to small fellowships which emerge far removed from other house fellowships in order that they might find ways of banding together into a great congregation. The Board might well give continued study to the division of churchly activity between the small house fellowship and the great congregation.

Paul M. Miller has been a member of the Goshen Biblical Seminary faculty since 1952 where he serves as professor of practical theology. His gifts as a preacher and teacher have been widely used. Among his writings are Servant of God's Servants, Group Dynamics in Evangelism and Equipping for Ministry.

Editorial Comment

The perennial question facing the church is how she can be renewed in order to fully experience the flow of divine power and blessing which she knows is hers by birthright. Diagnosis of the problems has not been easy. For some the reasons lay in the direction of archaic structures. For others the causes stem from a coldness of heart. Both answers oversimplify and fall short.

The church does not exist in a vacuum. The world is dynamic and consequently the frontiers of the church's mission constantly change. It is self-evident that the body of Christ must be supple enough to flex and move with the times. But to do that faithfully, there must be immediacy of communion with Christ Himself.

One aspect of the church about which there has been increasing self-doubt has been the forms of church life. The days of stable rural life are gone. The pace has accelerated greatly. Members of congregations no longer have frequent contact with one another in the workaday world. There is serious reason to question whether the present patterns and structures--a legacy from another age--can be trusted to carry us through.

In the first place, we must deliberately provide for periods of greater concentration as congregations. The present shape of things underscores the fragmentation. Second, there needs to be evaluation. Some of what we have been doing should continue. In other cases programs designed for another period have outlived their usefulness and need to go. Third, the reshaping that we do should be done in full consciousness of the fundamental mission of the church. Some current church programs derive from the era when self-preservation was a stronger force than was mission.

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CHOOSING LEADERS IN THE CONGREGATION

Paul M. Miller

Introduction

For the Free/Believers' Church the central reality is not in the church structure or hierarchy as in the Roman church. It is not in the Word and Sacraments duly ministered as in the Protestant tradition. Neither is it in miracles and charismatic gifts newly given as in the Pentecostal tradition.

For the Believers' Church the central reality is the Living Lord in the midst, actively leading His people to consensus about problems of practical obedience. Leadership and structures are real, to be sure, but clearly to serve this central reality. Charismatic gifts are sought and felt, but they serve this central reality too, as do the Word and Sacraments.

This issue of Mission-Focus will explore what the above position implies for discerning of gifts, selection of leaders and decision-making in general.

Leaders Are Needed

Leaderless meetings have some unique values, especially for heightening interpersonal dynamics. They can be very enjoyable and profitable for times of sharing and informal fellowship. Lack of a leader also releases a lot of hidden "power-hungers" and "under-the-table" agenda.

Because leaderless meetings can be such fun, some people mistakenly conclude that all church life should be conducted this way. But in both the Old and New Testaments, God insisted that leaders be chosen, be given a clear description of duties, and be held accountable before God and the group for those duties. Just "passing the leadership around" does not seem to be a Biblical way.

Christ made it clear that leadership in His movement must be radically different from that in the world, where hierarchy abounds, and "great men exercise authority" over the common people (Mark 10:32-45). In fact, the Apostle Paul discerned that one of the present activities of the ascended Christ relates directly to leadership in His church. From His place at the throne, the Lord of the Church sends gifts for ministry to every member. He also sends pastors and teachers as "gifts" to the church. The supreme task of these pastors and teachers is to equip the entire gifted congregation for their individual ministries to one another and to the world (Eph. 4). The risen Lord seems determined that the new movement He launched shall not develop a scribal or priestly caste.

Discerning of Gifts Is Ongoing Agenda

The ascended Christ hears the longings of individual members as they covet the gifts which their group needs so as to function as Christ's "now-body." Christ knows that even the most feeble member is necessary. If a person loves Christ and His church enough to serve with the Holy Spirit gift of "helps" (I Cor. 12:28)--(just the ability to help another Christian do his duty or reach his goal)--then Christ may give to this member any one of the other Holy Spirit enablements for ministry and task in mission.

The Holy Spirit may heighten one member's natural graciousness with the charismatic gift of hospitality; another member's common sense with the Spirit gift of wisdom; another member's disciplined concern for good health with the spiritual gift of healing; another member's spiritual fruit of joy with the spiritual gift of tongues; and another member's ability to do things decently and in order with the charisma of administration. The fruit of the Spirit manifested in love, joy, peace, goodness and patience are drawn into sharp focus when the Spirit gifts a person for the risky ministry of miracles, healing or tongues speaking.

Members of the church need to "affirm one another." Heartfelt words of sincere appreciation are the beginnings of discernment of gift. "You were very helpful to me in that discussion . . ." "God seems to have given you the gift of admonishing in love . . ." "You seem to be 'apt to teach' . . ." "You are very supportive . . ." "I detect that you care . . ." "You summarize a discussion very clearly . . ." "I sense that you can make strangers welcome. . . ."

The selection of leaders for both house fellowship and great congregation becomes a continuation and an extension of the affirming of one another, the discerning of gifts being given by God's Spirit. It is the calling forward of those gifts for specific service. Elizabeth O'Connor describes this discerning and calling forward of gifts as a new act of God, His Eighth Day of Creation. Natural abilities are God's gift in His ordinary "Seven-days-of-Creation," but special gifts for ministry in the church, discerned and called forward by a Spirit-led group, are something more than natural ability, something one has because Christ gave it for the sake of His body, something one dare never use for self-glory, and something God's Spirit may withdraw when a given work is done.

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The charismatic enablements are given by the risen Christ, not only to enrich the church's gathered life, but to empower her for mission. Some who comment upon Holy Spirit gifts see them "turned off at the door" (much like a lightning bug turns off its light) and not related to mission in the world. They imply that the Holy Spirit given gift of "healing" is somehow unrelated to the disciplined use of medicine.

In contrast to this Paul saw mission and evangelism as the supreme criteria for deciding when to use the gifts. Tongues speakers might hold back their ecstasy when unsaved visitors are present in the worship lest such visitors conclude they are mad (I Cor. 14:23).

If used carefully and interpreted with spiritual tact and understanding, the results of certain aptitude tests and personality inventories can be fed into the discussion of a Spirit-led group as it helps a member to discern his gifts for ministry or his call into specific service. Certain selection forms used in some group-dynamics labs can also be useful. Members can give their private or personal answers to such questions as:

The person in this group I would choose for the next leader is _____.
The person I would go to with a problem of doubt is _____.
The person I would want for supervisor if I worked in a factory is _____.
The person I would invite to go with me on a vacation trip is _____.
The person I would choose to talk to if I were terminally ill is _____.

Answers to these questions and others like them shared within the intimate and confidential group can indicate to a group member just how his group has discerned his gifts. Such tools should be used only when qualified leadership is present, so that the group can "process" such data to the benefit of all and the hurt of no one.

There Are Some Qualifications for Leaders

Some years ago the books on leadership listed "traits" of leadership like surgency (the ability to talk easily), enthusiasm, energy, decisiveness, determination, creativity, desire for excellence, ambition, intelligence and other such attributes which, taken together, almost profiled a "superman." Naturally some of these do have value in the Christian group as well. Good health, a good memory, a pleasing personality, common sense, and the ability to think on one's feet--these can be assets for a leader.

But Christ put the sincere desire to be servant high on His list of qualifications. The ability to "seek first the kingdom" was crucial. A compassion for the weak and the underdog, a self-forgetful humility, the ability to stand rebuff, the spirit which overcomes evil with good, and the readiness to seize the unused basin--these meant much to our Lord. Blessings were promised to the person who was meek, merciful, poor in spirit, who hungered for God's right-way (righteousness), and whose heart was pure.

The 12 apostles Jesus chose might have fared poorly if he had used the "apt-to-succeed" scales of the Romans and the Greeks!

When Paul listed for Timothy the qualifications for a leader, he included a good reputation among outsiders, a wholesome family relationship, a person temperate, dignified and hospitable. The only qualification which went beyond that idealized for every mature member was "apt to teach." One can be a good member without this gift but never a good pastor.

Aptness to teach is not fully a charisma or Holy Spirit enablement. If one is to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures in their depth, often requiring a knowledge of the original language, one cannot expect some gift of tongues to give the mastery of Hebrew and Greek! For some reason, those who claim the gift of another tongue never get the very tongue or languages which would help them to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the words of the Bible! Mastery of the Scriptural documents requires sustained, intense, Spirit-led study.

Paul told Timothy to rely indeed upon the gift discerned and confirmed when the elders laid their hands upon him (I Tim. 4:14), but for his teaching and preaching there also had to be a serious, sustained study--give yourself to the Scriptures, teach these things, attend to your preaching and teaching, give yourself wholly to them, and invite feedback on them (so all may see your progress)--I Tim. 4:11-16.

The church, in both the house fellowship and the great congregation, should value the Holy Spirit-given gift of prophecy and receive carefully the word of the prophet. It would be a mistake, however, to immediately assign an office or an official title to the prophet. God's Spirit may give His word of prophetic insight, exhortation, comfort, or rebuke to first one faithful member and then to another. All should covet earnestly this gift and hope that not only one person has it. It may be a mark of spiritual coldness in the congregation when only one person is prophet.

Persons who function alone and continuously as "prophet" often tend to become thorny characters, brooding intensely with God over His needy people and world, confronting the establishment, warning of judgment, appearing and disappearing, often lonely and misunderstood. Both the house fellowship and great congregation must hear and test the word of the prophet while continuously coveting the gift throughout the entire brotherhood.

The goal is always to equip the entire group for their work of ministering. The leader seeks constantly to enlist all of the gifts and skills of every member. Yet it is important that he himself is able to embody the cause, to think adventuresomely, to show affection, to secure emotional involvement, to invite honesty, to commend progress, and to make himself dispensable.

In addition to these attitudes, it is useful if the leader knows how to detect the belief-strength of members, how to define key terms, how to reflect back

questions for further clarity, how to rephrase helpfully, to link parallel comments, discourage detours, curb discussion hogs, resist propaganda devices, protect the minority, draw out silent members, utilize conflict creatively, absorb hostility without becoming overly defensive, to summarize progress, clarify the basis of decision, detect an emerging consensus, and lead the group to a fair and satisfying decision.

It may be that the portion of Christ's church which relies upon sacramental empowering for leadership has ignored the wisdom of group dynamics because the sacrament was enough. It may be that the charismatic churches have felt that charisma was enough. It may be up to the Believers' Church, which sees reality carried by the deciding group, to take the dynamic power of group life seriously.

Leader Selection Uses Inner Discernment and Objective Counsel

The church has used many methods in selecting leaders, and many methods can indeed "work." In a laboratory situation, I once asked persons to volunteer to be leader and then hid these results. Then I had the group use majority vote and withheld this result. I had some "authorities" look over the group and help me pick a leader so he would be "chosen by the administration," but withheld this result. I then led the group to use the "lot," which they did with appropriate seriousness.

After all methods of leader selection were completed, only then were the results announced to the group. No one who had volunteered was chosen by any other method, and none of the four methods resulted in the same person being chosen for leader! It is obvious that many methods can fail to "work." God can honor and use various methods, however, if His people act in reverent love.

Selection of a leader is an activity which neither the house fellowship nor the great congregation should do alone. The house fellowship may well discern its own leaders by ongoing discernment of gifts, but the elders of the great congregation should share in the selection process and the commissioning (if there is to be such). Suggestions for change of leaders may emerge from either house fellowship or elders, but never be carried through or concluded without the cooperation of both. A small group needs both the subjectivity of intimate knowledge of one another, and the objectivity of someone impartial, from outside.

The great congregation should take counsel from its constituent house fellowships when congregational elders are being chosen, as well as when other officers of education, mission, mutual aid, social action, and fellowship are selected and commissioned. It may be that each house fellowship could name one of its members to a "leadership selection committee." This leadership selection committee could hear reports of all the gifts which have been discerned as part of the ongoing life of the house fellowships. They could interview these gifted persons as to their availability and sense of call for the work. They could then bring a slate of one nominee for each office (with their report of his gifts and readiness to serve) to a meeting of the great congregation

which could either accept their nominee by consensus or send them back for further discerning and conferring. The nominee's testimony could be heard in the meeting or members could question him as to his sense of call. There would be no voting but acclamation by consensus.

When the great congregation desires to call forward a man-of-the-Word to ordain for a ministry as preacher-teacher of the Scriptures, the district conference of the brotherhood must also be involved. Although the congregation initiates and carries through the ordination of persons for the Christian ministry, they should involve the conference minister or bishop and the faith and life committee or personnel committee of the district from start to finish.

The great congregation should select a committee to lead them in the work, or else assign it to the elders. They should take counsel from "both sides," from the house fellowships on one side, and district conference leaders on the other. They should seek to discern whether God has given in their own congregation the person needed. They should receive from conference leaders suggestions of others whose gifts and experience might match the congregation's need.

The leadership selection committee (or pastoral or pulpit committee as it is sometimes poorly named) should interview nominees from either house fellowships or conference leaders until they come to unanimous agreement upon a person to recommend. They should arrange for the appropriate committee of conference to examine him, and if he passes this test, recommend him to the congregation.

House fellowships which desire that the nominee should meet with them may request this. On an informal fellowship occasion the nominee and congregational members may share their vision of church faithfulness and growth. Representatives of house fellowships may go to hear the nominee preach, or he may be invited into the congregation to preach.

House fellowships should seek to come to consensus upon accepting a given nominee. Their representative should bring their report to the leadership selection committee, and if consensus is reached, this committee should bring a recommendation to the great congregation. Consensus should be the ideal here, with reluctance to announce required percentages or to carry through the usual voting. If the sense of the meeting seems to be less than 75% approval, the leadership committee should take the matter back for further prayer and work.

It should be admitted that complete consensus is easier to achieve in the house fellowship than in the great congregation, and the house fellowships should bear the brunt of talking through the disagreements. But consensus should remain as the ideal and goal of all congregation decisions (see section "Discerning of Gifts Is Ongoing Agenda").

The watching world knows only too well how disunity, intrigue, and deceit plague their decision-making. Spirit-led consensus may well be one of the modern miracles by which God validates His people.

Clear Goals and Responsibilities Coincide with Holy Spirit Spontaneity

All through history God's Spirit seems to alternate between clear structures, laws and goals, and the new and the unpredictable. There are the inspired documents of Scripture, fixed and unchangeable, and the prophetic word in which the Wind of God blows where it lists. There is the constitution of the congregation and the charismatic fellowship group. Congregational leadership should provide for both and rely upon both.

Goals should be stated so clearly that progress can be checked by them. Responsibilities should be stated so clearly that every office bearer knows where his duty ends and that of another office bearer begins. A person skilled and trained as a "change agent" can sometimes assist a group to get its organizational structure to align with its goals and objectives. This is known as "organization development."

Goals and objectives should include those assigned by God to His people, drawn from a study of the Scriptures, or suggested by the congregational constitution. They should also include those which emerge as a composite of the hopes and needs of members. They should be updated from time to time by the new workings of God's Spirit in the midst, new gifts for mission, and the new cries of human need in the neighborhood. Members should review their goals and objectives about once a year to see whether they embody God's newest leading, are really chosen by the group, are understanding, reasonably attainable, and translatable into sub-goals and programs of action.

Although goals are agreed upon by the organized group, and clearly defined duties assigned to office bearers, neither house fellowship nor congregation should seek to assign offices to all those to whom the risen Lord by His Spirit gives charismatic gifts. So the assigned preacher-teacher expositis the inspired Scriptures, and then in addition God's Spirit gives a prophetic word of insight or admonition to a member. The elders gather for the prayer and "anointing with oil" service for the sick member according to James 5, and the Holy Spirit gives the gift of healing to some members who covet it earnestly, as suggested in I Corinthians.

The men who are full of the Holy Spirit for the business of mutual aid (Acts 7) set out to meet the needs of the poor widow, and then the charismatic gift of "helps" is given to another member to help spontaneously. Someone elected to teach prepares his lesson and leads out in teaching only to have the Holy Spirit give the gift of wisdom or knowledge to additional persons in the group. The person appointed to lead the singing and joyous praises of the congregation may lead the choir in a mighty anthem, and then God's Spirit gives to someone the charisma of tongues and exalting praise. The fellowship committee of the congregation plans structured occasions to maximize spiritual sharing, and then the Holy Spirit supplements it well by giving someone the gift of hospitality. The Spirit which moves through structures is the same as the one moving in newness and spontaneity, and the two expressions of Spirit life and power complement each other. It is a tragedy when they split apart.

Inevitably the group, or congregation, feels that the person in whom they have discerned the gifts should also be assigned an office. It is true that office bearers should possess the supporting gifts, but they do not have all of the gifts. Rather they should join with the group in the constant prayer that the Holy Spirit may gift every member, that these gifts may be discerned and enlisted as needed. The Holy Spirit must be so sovereign in the congregation that every crisis is met by new gifts given throughout the group, and the duly elected leadership so flexible that new gifts of the Spirit may bring their blessing to the whole group and not be shunted off to a schismatic subgroup.

Decision-Making Goes On In This Milieu

Changes of mind are always moving by sub-formal means--informal conversation, the mood of meetings, the announced changes of mind on the part of members, the pressures of the godless age, and responses made during encounters with God in worship. Actual crises which call for corporate decision become times when the house fellowship and the great congregation "confess their faith," pause for "station identification," and rediscover how it really is between the living God and His people who are to be following Him in history and to be evangelizing His world.

Either the house fellowship or the great congregation may become aware of the problem and set out to define and analyze it. Either one may lead out to study the Scriptures afresh, suggest alternative solutions, and invite the entire brotherhood to prayerful testing of proposed solutions.

Two or more different house fellowships may be asked to serve as "task forces," each one to explore carefully the implications of a specific alternative and report back to the great congregation.

Some house fellowships may volunteer to utilize the "Quaker meeting" way of seeking God's will, waiting long in live silence before the living God until somehow His living Word comes through a "sense of the meeting." Specialists in group dynamics are experimenting with "solution-proposer" models, modified forms of debate and other such methods. Some may be usable in the church.

The church, as the family of God, should not readily rely upon mere democratic process to make decisions. Parliamentary process is good enough for a secular situation, where expediency and compromise are expected, minimal justice for all is the goal, and majority rule is the method. Mere majority was not God's way among His pilgrim people.

The church should set "Spirit-driven-agreement" as her goal, and try to "talk-up-a-consensus." Christians believe that the Holy Spirit has one mind about the matter, and that if they are yielded to the Spirit and to one another, God will lead them to that which "is seeming good to the Holy Ghost and to us." Spirit-driven consensus should be sought reverently as a new act of God's grace for and among His people. Members should search their hearts to be sure they are attuned to God's Spirit, with no hindering sin.

Each member should expect the group's wisdom to be wiser than his own, should approach the meeting asking God's Spirit to release new gifts required for this hour of need, and should try to listen to his fellow-believer the way he hopes God listens to his own prayers.

Members should gladly announce ways in which they are changing their mind as they listen to one another, because it is in the direction of the announced changes of mind that the Spirit-driven consensus will likely appear.

One member after another can try to give "the conclusion to the whole matter," as all members keep testing every solution. If God's Spirit is really moderating the meeting, a proposal will likely come which "seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us."

If no solution can be agreed upon which evokes strong consensus, the group may feel that a given proposal is good enough that it merits testing. Members who still have reservations can offer to go along with the almost unanimous proposal if the group will agree that it is "for testing," and will be reviewed later on.

The path a given problem takes as it moves toward solution should be one of "alternation." The great congregation may have expository preaching upon related portions of Scripture, and then the house fellowships take up the matter in intense face-to-face discussion.

House fellowships may report back to the congregational elders, who sense what is needed next so as to consider the matter fully and fairly. The elders may arrange for input and discussion again in the great congregation, claiming the "ground gained" and helping the congregation to renew its covenant to do God's will as He makes it clear.

As this principle of alternation is followed, it is hoped and expected that the house fellowships may come to consensus first, and that then the great congregation may come to consensus without voting.

The principle of alternation should be observed in still other ways. The church should ask alternately: What is God saying through the organized work of His Spirit, through the Scripture, through study conferences, through specialists in the area of concern, through reports of task forces, through responsible officers? After this they should ask what God is saying through new or spontaneous manifestations of His Spirit, through charismatic gifts or prophetic words newly given, through signs or miracles in the midst, through a consensus given during the "live silence," or through the slow congealing of conviction?

The alternation principle should be utilized also as small steps of obedience are taken and then results are studied. The defining of the problem, weighing of alternatives, deciding upon a plan of action sequence must be alternated with an examination of the consequences, feedback from those affected, and a waiting upon God for His next leading.

The house fellowship and the great congregation may well ask a member trained in group process to function as "observer," noticing any "hidden agendas," "scapegoating," "Star formation," "Mirror-reactions," unfair use of humor, undefined terms, one-sided presentations, untactful feedback, lobbying, etc. He may function as a prophet, calling the group to repentance and new beginnings if he can humbly and tactfully report back what he has been seeing. The spirit and depth of the problem solving of the church remains one of the crucial tests of her maturity.

Paul M. Miller has been a member of the Goshen Biblical Seminary faculty since 1952 where he serves as professor of practical theology. His gifts as a preacher and teacher have been widely used. Among his writings are Servant of God's Servants, Group Dynamics in Evangelism and Equipping for Ministry.

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MENNONITES AND EVANGELISM

Glenn Brubacher

It is important for us to reflect on evangelism. As I read the climate of the Mennonite Church, this subject will receive much attention in the 1970's. We need to reflect together on what evangelism means to us as Mennonites and what some of the barriers are to our becoming a missionary community in North America. Listening in on contemporary Protestant and Roman Catholic theological debates about evangelism is necessary and informative, but we need to examine our own history and community also.

What I write relates to the Ontario scene as I have observed it. However, it is also related to things I have seen on the broader North American Mennonite stage.

What Is Our Gospel?

Mennonites do not have a common theological viewpoint from which they can unitedly do their evangelism. A review of what was said at Probe '72 tells us that. Members of the Mennonite Church need not go to the General Conference Mennonites or Mennonite Brethren for comparisons to see the truth of that observation.

In his address at the Constitutional Convention of the Mennonite Church in Kitchener in 1971, Richard C. Detweiler identified three streams of theology which have left a profound impact on our denomination. These were necessary to correct some undesirable tendencies.

The three streams were: atonement theology (with emphasis on Jesus as sacrifice), incarnation theology (with emphasis on Jesus as servant to needy people and a life of compassionate service to a needy world), and charismatic theology (with emphasis on Jesus as the Spirit-giver, God's extraordinary intervention into the world of people, and zeal and joy in Christian living).

Detweiler appealed to the Mennonite Church not to discard these three theological approaches and their impact on Christian life. He then went on to suggest that we have a common perspective in our heritage which emphasizes a faith rooted in the resurrection of Jesus. He called for us to gather around the Anabaptist insight into faith emphasizing discipleship rooted in the resurrection.

Within the Mennonite Church each of the first three streams has brought its own style and approach to evangelism. Atonement theology centers on the sovereign, unmerited grace of God in sending Jesus to save sinful people from eternal damnation. It calls people to receive Jesus as Savior and eternal life as an escape from eternal damnation.

The incarnation stream focuses on Christian service. The task of evangelism is to show people the meaning of God's love by the things that are done and said. The purpose of evangelism is to call people to experience Jesus and join him in loving and serving people.

The charismatic stream emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit. Its view of conversion is not too much different from that of atonement theology but stresses particularly the role of the Holy Spirit. It focuses on the equipment, the gifts which God gives His people in evangelizing the world.

The Mennonite Church is in search of a common perspective that will hold our community together with its varying theological approaches. Anabaptism is suggested by some as that unifying bond. But there are a number of crucial issues that we face as we think about Anabaptism being that unifier. Although Anabaptist principles have been articulated with creative clarity, they still have to be experienced more widely in our church before they can become that common bond.

At present Anabaptism is a rational vision held by scholars and some pastors and church leaders; but it is a vision experienced only at the edges of Mennonite life and poorly understood by many Mennonites. Furthermore, there is no agreement as to what Anabaptism should be for us. Some say that Anabaptism emphasizes discipleship, others evangelism. For some it means the prophetic rebuke of self-righteous and arrogantly sinful society and its churches, but for others it signifies separation and nonconformity to the world. To some the heart of Anabaptism is peace and the way of love.

Many Christians tend to focus on one or two of the major moments in Jesus' ministry to men. Why do these theological systems pay attention primarily to the incarnation, or cross, or resurrection, or ascension, or pentecost, or second coming? Apparently, these theological streams need to start somewhere. That starting point is fundamentally important to understand the remainder of Jesus' work--so it seems. To concentrate on one aspect of Jesus' work in that way shapes and distorts the total picture of His ministry and what it means to be a Christian. This abbreviated gospel is then proclaimed, and its friends and enemies identified. And the task of evangelism is narrowed.

That approach troubles me. I would like to offer some reflections in another direction.

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Paul suggests in Ephesians 4 that the purpose and function of the gifts of Christ were, among others, to bring persons to mature manhood, that is, measured by the manhood of Jesus Himself. The goal of God's work in the world in saving people is bringing them to their full potential as His creation. The goal of God's salvation is to make people like Jesus and to call into being a community of "Jesus people." What God did through the work of Jesus is His contribution to make that happen.

The New Testament gives us direct and pointed information about Jesus as God's Son and as perfect Man among men. He is the Savior of the world because He is God's Man. As Savior He called us to be like Himself. The New Testament also tells of what He did for people through His incarnation, cross, resurrection, ascension, the sending of His spirit, and what He will do in His promised return in completing their salvation.

Not one of these events (or aspects of His being), and the teachings He gave concerning it, can alone define and direct His people toward that goal of becoming like Him in His manhood. To choose any single point in Jesus' ministry as the lens through which to view the whole distorts His saving work. It hinders His ministry of making people the creatures God intended them to be.

Here I can only briefly trace the major moments of Jesus' ministry and indicate the significance of each. In the incarnation Jesus showed that 1) faith must be lived to be understood and communicated. 2) Jesus established for us the vision of God's people being the present and visible expression of the kingdom of God. 3) Jesus declared how this kingdom is to be formed, how it is to be guided and ruled, and how its members are to relate to each other, to non-kingdom people and to God.

The death of Jesus on the cross is the place where God offers His forgiveness to sinful people. The cross establishes the style of life of His people. They are suffering cross-bearers. That is the way Jesus served and triumphed--and so will His followers.

In the cross and resurrection Jesus conquered sin and death. He offers to liberate men from sin and create an obedient Christ-like life. Death is not the end of life. The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope of a completely good life with God beyond death.

The ascension of Jesus demonstrated dramatically what was also seen in His life in Palestine: He is the Lord; He is the Lord, or head, of His people and Lord of the whole world. At His promised return He will complete His work among His people and in the world.

The last of the major moments of Jesus' ministry to save people was the sending of the Spirit. The Spirit is given as a continuing help to the church following the ascension. He is the source of the ministries, gifts, and power for the people of God. He makes operative the ministry of Jesus.

Only as a person has opened himself to all of these facets of the ministry of Jesus can he know truly the salvation God gives and enjoy the redeemed creaturehood that Jesus represented. Our evangelism must grow from a conviction that only as we present this total ministry of Jesus are we faithful to Him and His gospel.

Whom Shall We Evangelize?

In our society much of what passes for evangelism is concerned with freeing people from the misdirection of other denominations and religions. The assumption is that "our" group, whatever denomination it may be, is free from misdirections and distortions. Shall Mennonites enter that demonic battle? Whom shall we seek out? Just which group of disenchanteds?

One of the facts of ecclesiastical relationships is the movement of disenchanted and searching persons from one denomination or group to another. Shall we capitalize in any way on that situation? Or, from a positive point of view, do we have a ministry to such people? Much of the growth of Ontario Mennonite Conference congregations has come from the flow of disenchanted and searching people from other Mennonite groups. These Mennonites have often been more traditional. That has tied us even more to ethnic roots and created problems in reaching other Canadians.

Can we expect a response from middle-class Canada or will our evangelism continue to be with the poor in urban or rural settings and with traditional Mennonites? We still have to demonstrate that we can reach middle-class Canada in a pastoral as well as prophetic role. One of the problems we face is that the society to which we are speaking is composed of cultural and intellectual streams which do not readily converge with what the Mennonite Church represents.

Conservatives find Mennonites too much concerned with the social ills of society, and liberals find Mennonites too conservative theologically. For the mass of middle-class Canada, Mennonites are known as an ethnic subgroup of whom you take quaint pictures. We have in our own self-understanding (as well as in the public mind) an ethnic hangup which is a decided impediment to evangelism and church growth.

In my observation of Mennonite congregations in North America, I have come to the conclusion that those congregations long established in concentrated Mennonite communities are not evangelistic in the sense of being in touch with non-Mennonites in the community. Wherever migration is the major source of growth of a congregation the same thing is true. There are exceptions and there are hopeful indications of change, but my observations describe the predominant experience.

What Shall Be the Form of Our Congregational Life?

The form of our congregational life is being discussed constantly among us. We are not sure what direction we should take. Until we find forms we really believe in, we will not be able to move energetically into building congregations. At present we seem to have lost our nerve in attempting to follow traditional forms in new locations, but we have not found our way to a replacement. That may be more true of the Ontario Conference than elsewhere. At any rate I sense some doubt about the congregational pattern we seek in new locations.

We do need to develop congregational forms which give opportunity for expression of two basic skills that are part of evangelism. One is the open and caring love that is a part of Christian relationships and is the basis for the

evangelistic approach. Fundamental in the New Testament is the idea that God uses relationships as a primary way to give us His grace and salvation. Symbols are sacraments, and so is the preached and read Word. But prior to these are people in whom God dwells and through whom His grace is given. It is in the context of these relationships that the Word of God is shared and that service in love is given. Symbols as sacraments are useful to God only in a community which knows the coming of grace in its caring brotherhood.

A second aspect of the evangelistic task is clarifying personal faith, speaking it in a language the listener comprehends. The form of congregational life which allows best for learning and practice of these abilities is a smaller group which seeks to develop the full meaning of its life and mission. This is a simple, practical observation and not necessarily a theological perspective.

Faith that is alive for people cannot be mass-produced and sustained. It is more and more apparent to me that we have a long way to go in making our congregational life and relationships redemptive and creative for evangelistic work. It is interesting to note that there are signs in our society of a longing on the part of many people for the more direct and personal life of a primary community. If the church is true to her Lord, she has Life to offer to those seeking community in love.

Concluding Comments

We experience continuing debate among us about the importance of evangelism as over against service. J. D. Graber has said, "We believe that the word needs the deed to demonstrate what the word means, and also the deed needs the word to explain the meaning of the deed." I agree. He goes on to say, "Rather than pitting the word against the deed, I submit that we have become strong on the deed, but have remained weak on the word." (Quoted in Preparing for Church Membership, Ernest D. Martin, MPH, Scottdale, 1971, p. 80.) J. D. Graber said these words as a long-time church leader and mission administrator who observes the flow of institutional life of the Mennonite Church. His comment is too kindly when applied to the average congregation. He could have said, "Our deed is superficial and our word is weak." For far too many people in our congregations the deed is cooking food or making blankets for the MCC Relief Sale. That is good--along with other things like it--but it is not enough! Too many of us find articulating the word of God's love in Jesus impossible.

The Mennonite Church was initially led by men who believed that every member was a missionary, a servant of Jesus. A study of our recent history suggests that evangelism is to be done by professionals in communities distant from where most of our members live. Let us pray to God that we may become active missionary communities where we live--not only where we pay others to share Jesus.

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Editorial Comment

In a world where we are often tempted to reach for the overly simple solution, it may strike us wrong at first to be told that there are varieties of evangelism. Not only are there different kinds of evangelism but these produce unique results. It is no mystery, for example, to find that Fundamentalism and civil religion make congenial bedfellows. In his article, "Trends Among Fundamentalists" (Christianity Today, July 6, 1973, pp. 12-19), Elmer Towns explains the rapid growth in Christian day schools as motivated by several factors, including "a desire to promote a deep-seated patriotic conservatism, which fundamentalists charge is absent in public schools."

Our evangelistic message and methods can reveal us at our best as well as at our worst. Evangelism that is effective is marked by a consistency between message and method. Mennonites too frequently have been dependent on methods designed to fit another mood and tradition rather than their best insights with the result that their evangelism was strained and awkward.

Our heritage suggests that for us evangelism is an invitation to discipleship and not a call to "cheap grace." This argues against an easy acceptance of methods which attempt to induce quick and ill-considered decisions. It calls for the building of relationships of trust as preparation for sharing the good news. It requires that evangelism be a brotherhood action so that the words of the evangelist are supported by the example of the church.

However, our tradition also brings to the evangelistic task a sense of total urgency. Such urgency is not created through Madison Avenue salesmanship but rather by the responsiveness of God's people to His Spirit.

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TRAINING FOR MINISTRY AND MISSION

James D. Kratz

One of the frequently mentioned concerns in the church is what is called the leadership crisis. The following comments are sometimes heard: "Look at the number of congregations across the North American Mennonite Church without pastors!" "Notice how few students are preparing for the pastoral ministry in our seminaries!" "Notice how few seminarians enter the ministry after they complete their seminary training!" "Think of the number of persons who have left the pastorate to work in church institutions and secular employment!" While these may or may not be valid observations about congregational leadership in the Mennonite Church today, it might be helpful to look at leadership in the church in other ways.

Ross Bender and his colleagues at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries have done the Mennonite Church a fine service through the Dean's Seminar, a project which was completed in 1970. The published report of that study, The People of God, is worthy of serious study on the part of Mennonite congregations. The following paragraphs taken from that study bring into focus a number of concerns as we think of congregational leadership in our churches today:

> The ministry which Christ gives to his followers is binding upon all the members of his body. The means by which this ministry is to be operationalized are the gifts of the Spirit which are given to the church. These gifts are to be discerned and exercised in the congregation. In the old covenant, they took forms which have been generalized as priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministries; although the general functions were distinct, all were recognized as somehow derivative from and essential to the well-being and fulfillment of the mission of the Israelite community. In the new covenant, they took forms generalized as preaching, teaching, healing, shepherding, etc., but again all those who fulfilled these functions were ministering essentially to and through the whole laos (people).

> Although there is in the New Testament no one normative pattern of church life and ministry to be followed in each generation, and though there was considerable freedom for the Holy Spirit to guide the churches in developing such patterns, the Scriptures are instructive and authoritative in the matter of determining principles for modern structures of church life and ministry and for making judgments about the faithfulness and appropriateness of particular historical models. For instance, we can say on the basis of New Testamant (sic) authority that every member has a ministry (Romans 12:4-8; I Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:4-16), that this ministry is not just his gainful employment in the secular realm but a job to be done in the corporate life of the congregation, in its worship, in its teaching, its preaching, its discernment of God's will, in its government, and in its diakonia in the world. These tasks are specifically assigned, multiple in the sense that one function might be shared by several members, and diverse in the sense that the church's mission requires a variety of functions to be assigned to one "minister."[1]

The Congregation: Community of Faith and Life

In thinking about leadership, it is important to recognize the importance of the congregation as the gathered community of God's people. As the biological family is a primary group in the sociological world order, so the congregation is a primary group in the family of God.

The word "congregation" suggests many things--a particular kind of building, people meeting together at prescribed hours in the week, people sitting in rows going through a certain order of worship once a week, etc. Too often we do not see that congregation as a community of faith whose total interaction within the community and outside of the fellowship is charged with the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. The congregation is that body of people who are brought together because of who they are in Christ.

It is in that congregational setting where faith is tested and the Scriptures are interpreted for daily living. It is in the setting of the congregation where leadership should be seen as a reality of brothers and sisters in Christ serving one another and carrying out the various ministries of the church such as worship, teaching, proclamation, discipline, service and witness to the world. Within the body of Christ, leadership is seen as service, not authority and power.

The concept of congregation must be viewed in a broader and more flexible way than has been true in the past. One is encouraged and excited about some of the developments in house churches and new fellowships that are emerging which may in fact more faithfully embody an Anabaptist-Mennonite concept of church than do the older established congregations of the denomination.

Too often we borrow our models of how the church is to function and carry on its business from the secular world around us. The hierarchy of values which places the janitor and the ushers at opposite ends from the pastor and the elders is not found in the New Testament concept of the church. The New Testament

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model suggests that all have been given gifts, and that in the excercising of those gifts, leadership is provided which contributes to the functioning of the whole. What on the surface appears to be a leadership crisis may in fact be a crisis in our understanding and commitment to a Believers' Church vision.

The preceding paragraphs are not intended to suggest a kind of "leaderless" fellowship or program. On the contrary, leadership is seen as being crucial for the welfare and renewal and growth of the church.

Leadership: Gifts to the Many

Western Protestantism has given as its legacy to the rest of the world a concept of the Christian ministry which sees the pastor as symbolizing all that the church is to be. The pastor, by virtue of his training, is to be competent as a preacher, teacher, administrator, counselor, evangelist, and community relations director. The congregation may admittedly recognize that their pastor has certain deficiencies, but the degree to which he does not measure up to expectations in any area makes him less than the ideal pastor. The seminary, college or Bible school is thought of as the place where the technical skills to be that ideal pastor are developed.

One of the real joys of being a member of a congregation is to realize that one is a part of a community of people which has many God-given gifts. These gifts are not given exclusively to one or a few people in the congregation but rather to every member of the group. It is quite normal to think of leadership in terms of a person or a few persons leading a larger group. The New Testament however suggests that there might be another concept of leadership in which case leadership is conceived as the many serving one another. Two of the New Testament passages (I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4) that discuss the subject of gifts suggest that every member does indeed have a ministry. "The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each one, for the good of all," I Cor. 12:7. "Each one of us has been given a special gift, in proportion to what Christ has given," Ephesians 4:7.

It may be unrealistic to assume that all of the gifts in a congregation can be properly utilized. However, this should be a goal that is never removed. Improper or insufficient utilization of spiritual gifts may be due to the inability to recognize the gifts that do exist.

The present pattern of leadership in the Mennonite Church generally assumes that the congregations who are able to afford it obtain the services of a salaried person as an employee of the church to be their pastor. If the congregation is large enough, has the financial resources and sees it as a priority, that congregation may in fact hire more than one person on a full or part-time basis to provide leadership. Smaller congregations which cannot afford a full-time pastor may have a somewhat more shared or multiple ministry, or the pastor simply does what he can on a marginal time basis to give the kind of leadership he is expected to give within the role his office carries. It is frequently the case that the congregation which can afford it not only gets a salaried minister but one who is well qualified and experienced for his task. Might it not make more sense for the present leadership pattern to be completely changed so that the best qualified and trained "leaders" are sent out to the

frontiers of mission as apostles, teachers, and evangelists while allowing the total fellowship to exercise leadership in existing congregations by serving one another?

Congregation: The Place Where Gifts Are Discovered

Admittedly, the proper discovery and recognition of gifts in the congregation is a most demanding task. There may in fact not be any set formula. If there is however a recognition of multiplicity of gifts, and if it is recognized that it is proper and orderly for a given office or function to be carried out in the congregation as a multiple ministry (as apparently was the case in the New Testament), then there is less need to find a person to fill a specific office. It may in fact be more in order to find ways of discovering who are the persons who are qualified to work in concert in giving attention to a particular area of the church's work.

The Book of Acts certainly suggests that the congregation is the place where the discernment and discovery of gifts are to take place. This may mean that seminary administrators and personnel departments of mission boards should give more attention to helping congregations in developing tools for gift discernment in the congregation, to be used at home and away from home, than in actually recruiting people for church service.

Congregation: Setting for Cultivating Gifts

The congregation must be seen as a significant place for the development and training of leadership. In overseas churches there has been a growing criticism and suspicion of theological education programs that take persons away from their homes for training and education. Jacob Loewen makes the following observation:

> In general, advanced education is received away from one's own community. This brings two problems. In the first place, the separation from one's community for years of study alienates one from local systems of communication. In very few instances can a graduate return to his home community as a prophet. In the second place, the absence from the local family environment makes it impossible for the new information and education to be shared locally at the moment it is received by the student. When the student returns home, he has already adopted a foreign view of life to such a degree that his message receives the same resistance as that of a foreigner.[2]

While cultural, psychological, and geographical distance between Harleysville, Pennsylvania, and Harrisonburg, Virginia, or between Elmira, Ontario, and Elkhart, Indiana, may not be as great as that between Zaire and North America, there may be some validity to the Loewen comment even in moving from one community to another in North America.

This does not mean that seminary training in the institutional sense is to be seen negatively. It does however mean that the sending of persons away from home for specialized training takes on new meaning. The time away from home,

the study program to be pursued, the commitments to the future all take on new meaning if and when persons are sent from their home community to some other community for "training."

The cultivation of gifts is a function that must be carried out in various settings. It is suggested here that more emphasis needs to be placed on leadership training and gift development in the context of the local fellowship along with the sending of certain persons for more advanced and/or specialized training to locations away from home. The following are a few illustrations of congregation centered efforts in leadership training:

1. Seminary Extension. During the past decade there has been a very rapid development of seminary extension program, first in Central America, then in other parts of Latin America, and in Asia and parts of Africa. While the seminary extension program developed largely in the missionary setting in Third World countries, it may well become operative in North American churches. There have in fact been certain efforts to develop theological education extension programs among certain minority groups in some of the urban communities. Might a "Seminary on Wheels" or a "Seminary on Wings" become a way to support and strengthen some of the concerns mentioned earlier in this paper?

2. Seminary Inter-Term. During the past few years, the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries faculty have been involved in a January inter-term program, whereby seminary faculty members engaged in intensive Bible study programs both in congregations and for conference groups. In a sense this is a program similar to the seminary extension programs developed in overseas churches on a more continuing basis. While this has been a very modest effort, it is my impression this has been a very significant program.

3. Project Timothy. This program functions in the Lancaster area Mennonite churches. After two years of experience, there appears to be a growing interest and support for this program. Chester Wenger, Secretary for Home Ministries and Evangelism of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities writes:

> We believe that the Apostle Paul followed a very sound principle of training church leaders by sharing with them intimately in the work, such as the relationship he built with Timothy, Titus, and others. As you know, many of our church leaders are not very mobile, but carry out their assignment in the local congregation. In the generations past it was presumptuous for a brother to seek the office of the ministry, but when leadership was needed nominations were made from the congregation and lots were cast as to which one the Lord had chosen. We feel that as the lot system gradually is being replaced, that we do not have a sound way of challenging and preparing ministers within our brotherhood. Project Timothy is an attempt to fill the gap with each pastor choosing one or two young men with whom he works closely and shares his ministry in various ways and younger leadership will feel the challenge and exercise themselves variously as they consider the Christian ministry. These exercises include reading

> good books, sharing personally between the older and the younger Christian leaders, undertaking specific assignments in the congregational life, learning to know the broader church through seminars and in the process of it all seriously considering a call for the ministry and the preparation that should accompany such a call.[3]

The Franconia Mennonite Conference in Eastern Pennsylvania is in the process of organizing a conference leadership training program directed by Richard Detweiler. This is designed to provide every pastor--whatever his previous training--with an opportunity for further growth and development. There are other programs at various stages of development. The Lancaster, Franconia, and other conferences are to be commended for the initiative and creativity demonstrated in giving attention to congregational leadership. It is too early to assess and critically evaluate the results of the Project Timothy and other similar programs. One of the crucial considerations however is the procedure and criteria used in choosing the persons to be trained.

Missionaries working at leadership training in Puerto Rico commented that the experience there indicates that training persons for congregational leadership can best be done in the context in which the trainees are serving and where they are in close proximity to the support and testing of friends and colleagues. In this sense the Project Timothy is significantly on target.

4. Congregational Bible Study. Some of us have childhood memories of mid-week winter Bible study programs in our home congregations and in neighboring congregations which were attended by all members of the family. The Sunday morning Sunday school hour hardly meets the need for a congregation's Biblical education. In recent years a number of interdenominational Bible classes (largely women's groups) have emerged across the country in which participants have become sufficiently serious about Bible study that they have committed themselves to homework and special study assignments. It is imperative that we become more serious about Bible study in the congregational setting as a prerequisite to thinking about the meaning of congregational leadership.

Congregation: The Sending Church

As the congregation discovers, develops, and utilizes gifts, it also must be in the business of sending from its group those whom God has called to move out and pioneer for the express purpose of being a part in the formation of new communities of faith. Congregations are sometimes strengthened by the sending of personnel resources they feel they can least afford to give up.

Congregational Leadership: Areas for Further Study and Concern

Over a two-year period several years ago, the Overseas Committee and administrative staff of MBM studied some of the concerns of leadership in overseas churches. There were several unresolved questions that came out of that study. It can be pointed out that to some degree the concerns in overseas churches are very similar to that in our North American churches. Some of those areas are the following:

1. The meaning of ordination. There is some unclarity in our understanding of the meaning of ordination. While there is a rejection of the sacramental view of ordination, there is at the same time a feeling that ordination gives certain power or authority or symbolizes "real" spiritual leadership.

2. Leadership and the sexes. It is not clear how women are to be recognized in areas of leadership.

3. Financial support question. The question of who is to be supported and how much support is to be given is a continuing concern. The earlier comments in the paper suggest that this is a concern which is most important as we think of leadership in the Believers' Church context.

4. Professionalism and borrowing. The tendency to simply borrow leadership patterns from our Christian neighbors, and the pressures of the secular society to imprint its leadership ideologies and structures on the church are continuing realities. We need to affirm our belief that the Scriptures are instructive as we attempt to find the way, and attempt to live a common life of faithfulness as the people of God.

From 1960-67 James D. Kratz was assisting the Toba Evangelical Church in Christian leadership training programs. Since 1967 he has been Associate Secretary of Overseas Missions, Mennonite Board of Missions. In addition, he is a member of the Goshen Biblical Seminary Board of Overseers.

1. Ross Bender, The People of God, Herald Press, 1971, p. 154.

2. Translated from a paper (Spanish) by Jacob Loewen, entitled "Hacía La Comunicación Con Impacto," presented at the Lima Conference on Communication, September 1967.

3. Paragraph of Chester Wenger letter to James Kratz dated June 13, 1973.

Editorial Comment

In approaching the matter of leadership training, we need to overcome the excesses of two polar opposites: 1) suspicion of training and 2) uncritical acceptance of professionalism in the ministry. There is a composite of attitudes surrounding each of these positions. The first position reflects insecurity over the viability of the Christian faith in the modern world unless the faith is guarded against confrontation with other fields of knowledge and experience. Those among us representing the latter position frequently have about them the uncritical enthusiasm of the nouveau riche. Neither position is satisfactory.

In the first place our approach to training should reflect a biblical view of ministry. There is no place given in the New Testament to a priestly class for the church is to be a "priesthood of all believers." Since every member of the body is endowed with a spiritual gift, there must be a comprehensive view of training.

Second, differentiation is required in training programs. For too long we have been hemmed in by the rigidly prescribed approaches to learning derived from the public school system. The church must begin with people where they are, take them to where they can go and do so in light of their particular calling/gifts.

The third observation is that we must recognize the distinctiveness of the people of God. This has been aptly pointed up by Paul Lederach in The Biological Family and the Spiritual Family (Herald, 1973). Their view of history and the world will not be served by secular models and assumptions.

This leads, finally, to the importance of training for mission. The life of the church is to be focused in her missionary existence. In choosing men to lead His people in their confrontation with the world at various times God called men (e.g., Moses and Paul) who were conversant with their times but wholly committed to the purposes of God. If the entire people is to be caught up in God's saving purposes in the world, they must be "wise as serpents but harmless as doves," as Jesus put it. Discipleship implies studied preparation both in world-awareness and Word-awareness.

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